

WOMEN STRUGGLE THROUGH HALF A MILE OF SMOKE IN SUBWAY

War. The density and quality of the fumes created in the tube, they said, were appalling.

President Frank Hedley of the Interborough and President George McAneny of the Transit Commission, with staffs of assistants, only waited for definite assurances that there had been no loss of life before starting rigid investigations to learn how the accident happened and how its repetition could be prevented.

Fist Fights in Dark at Every Door Of 10-Car Train as Women Rush Screaming Against Closed Exits

Guards Refuse to Let Passengers Out—Policeman Takes Command to Quiet Panic and Rescue Fainting.

Passengers in the third car from the front of the train noticed an odor of burning cloth and rubber as the train was slowing down to enter the 59th Street station. Flames broke into the car when it was about 100 feet from the station platform.

There was a rush to the other end of the car and a fight when the end door became clogged with screaming women trying to get back through the train.

Policeman Fred Norman of the Oak Street Station was in the car. He was off duty and not in uniform. Norman swung his shield from his coat lapel, and immediately took command to quiet the panic. His sharp commands stopped the rush and he tore a hand fire extinguisher from the side of the car and began playing a spray of the chemical on the spot where the smoke was rising.

The men in the car, at his command, went down the aisle trying to keep the more frightened persons in their seats.

A voice from the platform between the cars shouted:

"Look out for the electric current; shut it off somebody."

A man jumped at the electric switchbox in the corner of the car and pawed wildly at its levers.

Every light in the train snapped out. At the same time every light along the subway posts and in the station went out.

With the terror of darkness any control Policeman Norman had obtained over the frightened passengers was gone. Screams and howls came from scared throats and every door in the train was rushed.

The guards stood with their backs to the doors, refusing to open them because the train was not in a station. The next express station uptown was at 86th Street and the next downtown station was at 42d Street—but the guards clung rigidly to the rules.

There were fistfights and pulling and hauling fights in every vestibule between the ten cars of the train.

The volume of smoke coming from the burning insulation under the first car increased swiftly. It became more choking and irritating every moment.

Women began sinking to their feet and falling back against the seats, catching frantically at the persons next to them. Now and then a match was lighted, only to be slapped out by some one sensible enough to know that a fire in a woman's or child's fluffy dress might start something much worse than suffocation in darkness.

It was Policeman Norman who first was successful in forcing open one of the doors in the rear of the car where the fire started.

At once he leaped out to the side of the track, careless of the peril of the third rail. With sharp commands he directed the men in the vestibule to hand down to him the limp forms of women and children and some men who could be found by groping along the car and the seats.

One after another the guards through the rest of the train realized that to keep the doors closed meant the certain asphyxiation by smoke of the passengers locked in the darkness, and slid back the doors. Many of the passengers, partly overcome and nearly out of their minds with fright, crawled to the doors on their hands and knees and toppled to the stone ballasted track level.

Part of the dramatic story of the battle to save lives is the incident of Norman's bumping into an emergency telephone instrument in the darkness. He took it down to find he was connected with Interborough headquarters which at once put him through to Police Headquarters.

The Lexington Avenue express tracks are depressed sufficiently below the local tracks and the station level so there is room for the crosstown B. R. T. tunnel to run between them. There is a narrow emergency stairway winding up from the express level to the south end of the downtown local tracks. Only a few of the train guards knew of this emergency escape and were able to direct passengers toward it.

Scores of passengers wandered down and up the express tracks until they came to a spot where an emergency ventilating shaft gave them a gleam of light from above and a whiff of fresh air.

Policeman Norman's brief description of the situation furnished Police Headquarters with information warranting the calling of all ambulances in the city, the despatch to the scene of all surgeons attached to city offices and the advice to the Fire Department to send the Rescue Squad at once and also the mobilization of all the reserves in the police stations on the east side of the city.

Fireman Fred Ziegler, on his way to lunch from inspecting stores in East 58th Street, stepped across a subway grating on the sidewalk at 61st Street just as the smoke began to pour up from the tunnel. He could hear the tumult from below and sensed what was happening.

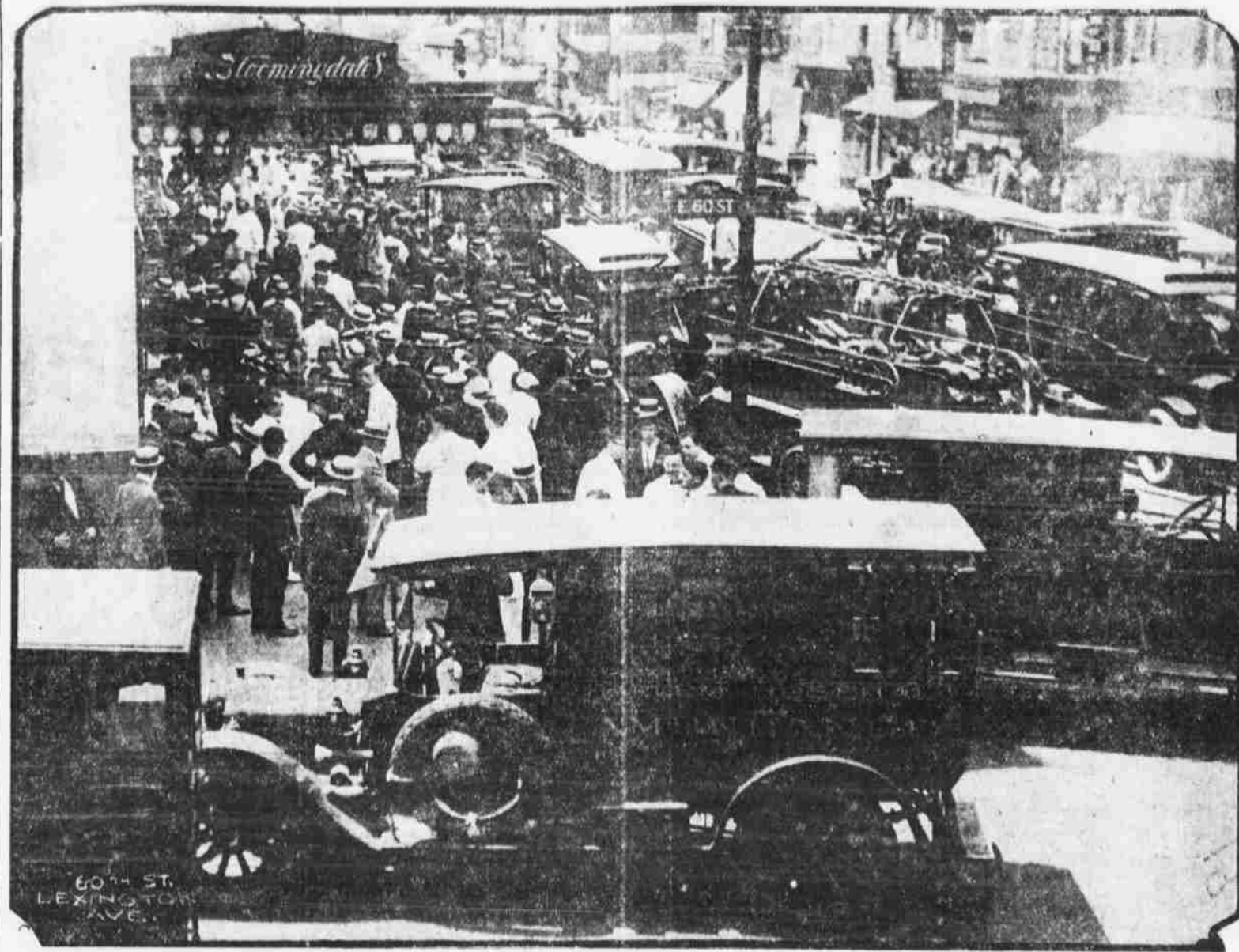
Ziegler pried up a section of the ventilator grating, dropped down the creaked wall into the subway and took charge of the work of members of the train crew in lifting down passengers from the doors and heading them for the 59th Street station. In a few moments ladders from a fire truck were put down from the street and passengers were taken up them to light and fresh air.

Heroism Saves Lives of Scores Of Women and Children Overcome In Lexington Ave. Subway Panic

Lieut. McGowan and Patrolman Fiegoli of the Old Slip station, homebound, were passengers on a northbound Lexington Avenue subway express train, when the fire occurred.

When the train stopped and excitement developed the two policemen, who were in uniform, assumed direction of affairs and assisted the cooler-headed men in guiding women

Ambulances and Fire Apparatus at 60th Street, Where One of First Aid Stations Was Established



and children from the tunnel.

"Things weren't so bad," said Lieut. McGowan to an Evening World reporter who met him as he emerged from the emergency exit at the southeast corner of Lexington Avenue and Fifty-first Street, "until the lights went out. Then the cars began to fill with smoke, which carried the odor of burning insulation and grease and also of some sort of powerful fire extinguisher. The atmosphere was stifling."

"There was considerable of a panic. The crash of breaking glass indicated that frantic passengers were breaking windows or breaking the glass part of side and platform doors. Guards told the passengers to pass through the train to the rear and get down on the tracks."

"Some of the men were very cool and did a lot in helping the women and children to the emergency exit. I judge that the last of the train was about under 55th Street. From there it was a walk of four blocks along the tracks to the 51st Street exit."

"When we got to the exit we found two men who had stationed themselves at the bottom of the winding, narrow stairway and were fighting back men who were trying to get out in front of women and children. There was a terrific jam at the foot of the stairway. Pretty soon another exit was opened and, with two stairways working, the tunnel was cleared, but many women had to be carried up."

John Wisner, of No. 575 East 137th Street, carried a woman who weighed about 200 pounds all the way from the train to the East 51st Street exit and up the steps to the street. He was given a lift occasionally, but in no main he carried her alone. The woman, unconscious, was placed in an ambulance and rushed to Bellevue Hospital.

When the advance guard of escaping passengers reached the top of the stairway of the emergency exit they found that the way to the open air was barred by a heavy iron grating. Two of the train guards put their backs under the grating and forced it out. No one in the tunnel apparently knew that there was another exit leading to the southwest corner until Ralph George of No. 2421 Arthur Avenue, the Bronx, discovered it, climbed it and forced the grating at the street level.

Annie Wolff, a business representative of Women's Upholstery, No. 330 East 58th Street, was passing the corner of 51st Street and Lexington Avenue when she saw the emergency exit leading out on the sidewalk move. She then heard voices faintly calling for help.

With the aid of several girls who had gathered the ration of the emergency exit and lifted out a small boy who had been overcome. He was followed by about thirty other persons, including many women and children. They were taken by Miss Wolff and her companions to the Young Women's Christian Association building nearby, where first aid was administered.

One old man who had been left in the tunnel, apparently overlooked, and who was unable to get to the street, was carried up by E. R. Barton, who runs a furniture store at No. 75 Lexington Avenue. Barton left his store as soon as he heard of the accident and went down into the tunnel, where he aided in the rescue work.

Miss Marie Kanner, proprietor of the Kraft Shop, No. 787 Lexington Avenue, closed her store and helped in first-aid work at the temporary hospital.

Splendid service in rendering aid of first aid to the stricken was

given by officers and employees of Bloomingdale's department store, which is near the scene. Samuel J. Bloomingdale was in his office at the time, and within a few moments had corralled all his porters and directed them in the work of rescue. Drs. Pollack and Blair of the Bloomingdale emergency staff, rendered valiant first aid service.

All the stock of aromatic spirits of ammonia in the Bloomingdale drug department was taken to the street, and aided in reviving scores. Cans of hot coffee from the lunch room proved a godsend to rescuers, firemen and victims alike.

William J. Webster, assistant superintendent of Bloomingdale's, was one of the first to descend into the subway to aid in the work of rescue. He was quickly overcome by the deadly gases and probably affected more quickly than others because he was badly gassed in the army overseas.

One of the most tragic of all the stories was that of an Interborough fireman by the name of Murphy, living in 102d Street.

Yesterday Murphy, a former service man, left the United States Government Hospital at Fox Hills. This afternoon he is in Bellevue. While at Fox Hills he underwent two operations. He was badly gassed in the World War.

Murphy went to work for the Interborough this morning. He was overcome today, was brought up out of the subway at 61st Street and in Naumburg's pharmacy, at No. 520 Lexington Avenue, was given first aid by Miss Emma G. Rush, a registered nurse, of No. 145 East 60th Street. Later he was attended by Dr. Morton, of the Fire Department. Murphy had partly regained consciousness when an ambulance left for Bellevue with him.

Within a half-hour Naumburg's and all other drug stores in the neighborhood were reported to have been cleaned out of their supplies of oxygen tanks. Every druggist and druggist's clerk in the district was helping the injured.

Conductor Frank Broadbaw was in charge of car No. 7 when the first flash came as the car was passing 58th Street. Immediately passengers started for the doors in a panic. When the train had been brought to a stop Broadbaw opened all of the doors and assisted the passengers to the tracks.

About thirty-six passengers in this car were taken to a street opening at 61st Street. At this point the express tunnel is below the local tracks in a lower tunnel and there is no station for express trains near there. The street opening is a narrow well extending up to the street surface and provided with ladders. The thirty-six passengers were carried up through this opening by means of ladders and reached the street in an unconscious condition.

Capt. Kelly of Fire Patrol No. 4, 59th Street and Park Avenue, was given first aid by a passing patrolman. Capt. Kelly was equipped for emergencies, were turned into the flames.

The chemical reaction following the use of fire extinguishers generated a gas that was unbearable, this unidentified victim informed the Mayor that the gas was evident just as soon as the Pyrene fire extinguishers, with which the subway cars are equipped for emergencies, were turned into the flames.

John J. Dwyer, conductor of the train, said he was at his post between the second and third cars when the flash came.

"It seemed to be in the middle of the third car," he said, "then there was another flash and dense smoke followed it. The motorman stopped the train about 64th Street I think."

"As soon as the fire began, the passengers began demanding of the guards that they open the doors and the guards did not know what to do. Michael Jacobs, a guard on the fourth

car, was very calm. He opened the doors of his car and directed the people to get down to the tunnel quietly. He then jumped down to the tracks and ran to the rear of the train so people could get nearer the emergency exit. Then he was overcome by the smoke."

Edward Lobers of Croton, N. Y., an employee of the New York Central Railroad, was standing in the vestibule of the third car of the train which caught fire, and directly beside the panel box from which the first flames issued.

"The first thing I knew," he said, "was when there was a dart of flame, the panel box broke and a piece struck me on the hand. Three times the flames went up and died down and then it seemed as if the motorman put on power, because there was another flash and all the lights in the train went out. There was a shower of sparks and a lot of smoke."

"The passengers got in a panic and made a rush for the rear of the train. I started back with them and on the way I smashed a number of windows. The people began climbing out through them. Several men and I helped the women and children to get out that way. The tunnel and the cars were filled with smoke."

Rev. Frank Shanley of the Church of St. Benedict the Moor, was passing the corner of 63d Street and Lexington Avenue a little after 11:50 o'clock.

"I faintly heard the sound of wailing and screaming coming from underground," said Father Shanley to an Evening World reporter. "It was uncanny. Others heard it. The sounds proceeded from a grating in the corner and somebody said it was an emergency subway exit and that undoubtedly there had been a bad accident below."

"We raised the grating and some of us descended the almost perpendicular ladder. I should say we went down almost 100 feet to the express track level. Then we walked toward the train."

"The atmosphere was suffocating. I met Policeman John Zeller, who advised me to tie my handkerchief over my nose and mouth. We helped a number of women to the foot of the stairs."

Charles E. Dippeler, a real estate broker who lives at the New York Athletic Club, was a passenger in the last car of a southbound Lexington Avenue subway train which came into 59th Street at the time of the fire.

"All the lights in our train went out and the cars were filled with smoke. There was a panic among the women on the train and many of the windows were broken. They climbed through these and made their way to the station. Some of us had to walk through the smoke-filled subway, and it was scarcely possible to breathe down there."

Russell A. Nugh, a moving picture camera man, was an indirect victim of the Lexington Avenue subway accident. Nugh was on his way to the scene with his camera in a taxicab and the chauffeur was paying no attention to traffic regulations. The taxi collided with another and Nugh was thrown part way through the front window. His face was badly lacerated and he wound up in St. Vincent's Hospital.

Samuel Berent, of No. 1027 Southview Boulevard, the Bronx, one of the passengers of the last car, said that the train was stalled for about three-quarters of an hour before the passengers were able to get out. After the train had been stalled fifteen minutes the fans stopped revolving and all of the lights went out, he said, and added that even the pilot lights in the vestibules of the cars failed.

The passengers were orderly until told to move toward the front of the train when the fumes began pouring into the rear cars. Several women became panic-stricken and their fright spread to others, and in a few seconds the orderly procession had been turned into a madly scrambling mob.

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Hedley Finds Cause of Fire Was Short Circuit in Panel Box on Fourth Car of Train

This Box Is Lined With Asbestos and Has Metal Door, With Nothing to Burn but Insulation on the Wires.

When the accident occurred Frank Hedley, President of the Interborough, was at the office of the Transit Commission. His first knowledge of it was given to him by a reporter of The Evening World. Mr. Hedley and Transit Commissioners McAneny and Harkness immediately took a taxicab and in company with The Evening World reporter went to 59th Street where, through a subway exit, they made their way to the car on which the accident occurred.

This car was the fourth in a train of ten cars. It was found that the short circuit occurred in a panel box on the front end of the car.

According to Mr. Hedley, this panel box is covered with a metal hinged door, is lined with asbestos, and there is nothing in it to burn except insulation.

Examination developed the fact, however, that the force of the blow-out was such that it threw off the lights in all the cars and even interfered with the proper working of the ventilators stationed at the emergency exits at 59th Street and at 62d Street.

According to trainmen examined by Mr. Hedley and by James S. Doyle,

one of the engineers of the Interborough, there were only about 200 passengers on the train. It could not be found that any of these passengers were so seriously injured that they had to be carried from the train. But when the lights of the train went out following the explosion in the switchbox, the hysteria of these passengers closely bordered on panic.

Transit Commissioners McAneny and Harkness, who also made an examination of the car in which the accident occurred, were unable to detect its cause. But they have ordered their engineers to make a thorough examination not only of the car and panel-box in which the switch was located but of all passengers who were in the car.

Power was again turned on in the subway at 1:15. The train was moved under its own power to the 86th Street station, the next northbound express stop, where Hedley and the Transit Commissioners returned to the street.

Mr. Hedley stated: "It is too bad we have not yet advanced to that stage of electrical science where we can forestall occurrences such as this. This is the first time an accident of this sort has ever occurred in this subway."

Gas From Extinguishers Deadly, Declares Expert, Amazed There Were No Fatalities in Accident

Dr. Harry M. Archer, an honorary Deputy Chief of the Fire Department, who helped revive stricken victims, is an authority on gases and fumes and their effects and has witnessed hundreds of fires.

"This," he said to an Evening World reporter, "was the worst attack of gas I ever experienced at a New York fire. It shows that fire extinguishers which are perfectly harmless in the open should not be used in such a confined space as the subway."

"Pyrene is a safe fire extinguisher ordinarily, but in a confined space it produces a gas that is quite deadly and similar to the gas that follows an explosion of firedamp in a coal mine."

"I am amazed that there were no fatalities, but I think I ought to warn everybody who went through the experience in the tube to get medical advice. Undoubtedly there will be serious results from this. The effect of the gas that these people breathed is to paralyze the respiratory tracts."

"We had to work over one man, Harry Yonjolsky, forty minutes before he was out of danger. He had apparently revived after twenty-five minutes of treatment with a pulmotor but completely collapsed again and was out for fifteen minutes longer."

Many Inquire About Victims As News Spreads Through City

News of the accident spread through the city with astonishing rapidity. Within an hour after the first reports were given in the newspaper extras many persons began to inquire at the East 51st and East 67th Street Police Stations about those who had reason to believe were on the train.

By 1:45 o'clock inquirers began to reach the East 67th Street Station from Brooklyn and the Bronx. They asked about people who left Brooklyn this morning by subway or were expected in the Bronx.

The public room of the station house was jammed at 2 o'clock. A newspaperman read the names of the victims of the accident as fast as they were brought in by patrolmen. Other policemen arranged an alphabetical list which was posted inside and outside the station house.

Swain, Walter J., thirty-one, Plainfield, N. J.

Vinney, Batavia, No. 100 East 129th Street.

Walsh, Tessie, No. 248 Brook Avenue, the Bronx.

Weir, Madeline, No. 287 Willis Avenue.

Weir, Genevieve, No. 287 Willis Avenue.

Weir, Mrs. Madeline, No. 287 Willis Avenue, Bronx.

Weise, Fireman Theodore, Engine No. 39.

White, Lawrence, No. 231 West 137th Street.

Yager, Morris, forty, No. 78 East 94th Street.

Yager, Morris, No. 518 East 114th Street.

Yonjolsky, Harry, 112 East 103d Street.

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